Winston's Place

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Winston's Place

by BelladonnaWyck, raiast

Summary

When he'd been considering the area for his wine bar, his realtor had sworn it was in a fantastic, up-and-coming neighborhood.

The realtor had failed to mention the derelict pub that sat directly across the street from Hannibal's future establishment, however, and it wasn't long at all before he began to realize why.

Notes

Day 21 of AU_Gust Prompts is: Professional Rivals

Featuring a mistaken identity and a snobby wine bar owner!

See the end of the work for more notes

When he'd been considering the area for his wine bar, his realtor had sworn it was in a fantastic, up-and-coming neighborhood. The statistics he'd pulled on crime rates were tolerable enough, for a location in an inner city, and there did seem to be new lofts and condos being erected on every corner, pulling in a younger, trendier, more affluent crowd.

The realtor had failed to mention the derelict pub that sat directly across the street from Hannibal's future establishment, however, and it wasn't long at all before he began to realize why.

For all the sophisticated clientele that wandered into the neighborhood in search of a respectable glass of wine, there still remained the gruff, blue-collar drunks that shambled into Winston's each afternoon and stumbled back out in the wee hours of the morning. Twice now Hannibal had witnessed one such patron *just* make it out of the bar before deciding the sidewalk was the proper place to get some shuteye. The first morning Hannibal had discovered this drunk - who he would come to know by his local moniker *Bourbon Pete* - he had quite thought the gentleman had perished overnight. It was only after venturing closer that Hannibal caught the subtle rise and fall of the man's chest, heard the soft, wheezing snore of a drunkard out cold.

More often than not, at least one of the bar-goers got sick outside, and not always on the *proper* side of the street. Hannibal has thrice now had to clean up a mess on the walk outside his own front before it can spend the morning baking in the New Orleans sun, and has lost a pair of Italian leather loafers to the volatile cocktail of cheap booze and greasy food. As if all these offences weren't enough to warrant a friendly chat with the proprietor of the rival establishment, an unexpected infestation has seen Hannibal sleeping in the empty loft above his bar while his condo is being fumigated.

If he'd thought dealing with the aftermath of the rival's clientele was unpleasant, he'd found himself outstandingly incorrect that very first night, when he realized how little respect the drunks of New Orleans had when their watering hole closed up and sent them on their way. Now, on his third morning of stepping out front to an unwelcome display of some stranger's sick with next to no sleep and even less patience, Hannibal is ready to do what he should have done to begin with and confront the owner of Winston's.

The door is unlocked, because even though there is no signage to indicate business hours, it's apparently in good taste for a drinking establishment to open its doors to the public before noon. Hannibal's own wine bar doesn't begin operating hours until four pm, in preparation for the businessman's Happy Hour at five.

Hannibal makes his way into the ramshackle building, surprised to see the sheer number of suspicious stains littering the place, more pool tables than chairs, and a man *sleeping* atop a pool table while a shaggy-haired dog keeps a lazy watch at his feet.

The dog doesn't bark as Hannibal approaches, but apparently he doesn't need to, as the man on the pool table slits one of his eyes open to peer at Hannibal. "Not open." He grumbles, throwing his arm over his eyes to block out even the low lighting in the room.

“Pardon me, but your door was unlocked.” When this doesn’t receive a response Hannibal clears his throat and tries again. “I’m here to see the proprietor. Do you know where I can find him?”

With a heavy sigh, the man on the pool table heaves himself up and dangles his legs over the side, using his socked foot to pet through the dog’s scruff. “Depends on who’s asking, I reckon.”

“I’m Hannibal Lecter. I own Saint Sebastian across the street.”

“The fancy wine place? What do you want with me?” The man looks around the room as though to show how far apart their two establishments could be.

“I had some concerns I wanted to discuss with you. They’ve grown in number the last few nights as I’ve been displaced from my loft for the foreseeable future due to some fumigation and now renovations. Do you have a moment?”

The man sighs again but nods, sliding his feet into his unlaced boots and stomping over to the bar. He leans over the top and pulls out a bottle of what appears to be whiskey - if the smell when he unstoppers the it is any indication - and takes a long pull directly from the bottle.

“What can I help you with, Mister Lecter?” He doesn’t use the honorific in a traditional way, more like it’s ingrained in him culturally to be polite whether he deems someone worthy or not. It rankles Hannibal a bit, but he ignores it and moves on.

“You see, Winston - may I call you Winston?”

The unkempt man gives a huff and jerks his head in the direction of the dog still sitting over by the pool table, his ears perked and head cocked to the side in attention. “You can call *him* Winston.”

“My apologies, Mister. -” Hannibal prompts, silently filing away the urge to ask this man why his bar is named after a mutt.

“Will. Just call me Will.” Will waves his hand vaguely, as though dispelling even the thought of propriety.

“Will. Saint Sebastian caters to a certain tier of clientele that I worry are being kept away by the rambunctious patrons of your establishment. And since I’ve been forced to stay in the apartment above my bar I’ve heard a lot of noise into the very early hours of the morning and seen quite a few men and women drunkenly stumbling about the street.”

Will blinks at him in silence for several seconds before bursting into laughter, a full, deep belly sort of laugh that brings a flush to Hannibal’s cheeks. “Let me get this straight. You’re worried my people are gonna chase away your uppity wine snobs?” Hannibal notices mischief in those sea-glass eyes as they scrunch up in humor. He isn’t sure why his stomach clenches a little at the man’s beauty, especially seeing as he’s a brute.

“There is also the matter of public health and safety,” Hannibal informs him in a clipped tone. “It’s hardly sanitary nor polite for people to get sick all over a public sidewalk, with no regard for who has to clean it up. And more than once I’ve seen one of your patrons spend the night on the ground right outside your front door.”

“It’s the Gulf, not like the elements are gonna get him,” Will gives an unconcerned shrug before taking another pull from his bottle.

“And should he fall victim to a mugger, or worse?”

“Listen, if you figure out a way to move Bourbon Pete after he goes down for the count, I’d love to be the first person you tell. Can I uh, get you somethin’, by the way?”

The Southern propriety is a little late on the uptake, considering Hannibal has been in the establishment nearing five minutes and received nothing from the man but a hearty laugh in the face. “It’s ten am,” Hannibal reminds Will flatly.

This seems to be news to Will, whose eyebrows shoot up his forehead as he lets out a low whistle. “That late? I better get a start on switching out the kegs. Alright Big Ben, you sure there’s nothin’ to be had? A nip of somethin’ might be good for that tension issue you got goin’ on. You might even crack a smile.” The latter is tacked on with wide eyes, as though such a notion would be quite the sight to see.

Hannibal’s spine stiffens even further, if possible, at the stranger’s mockery, and he doesn’t temper the cold steel in his voice when he responds primly, “I rather doubt there’s anything in this establishment I’d care to sample.”

Will’s lips twist into a smirk, his vibrant eyes mirthful and challenging when he replies, “I’ve got Macallan. Unopened. Savin’ it for a special occasion.”

“To which you deem this encounter?”

Will’s grin grows broad and easy, and Hannibal’s stomach does a flip at the sight despite his better judgement. “Not every day you make a new friend.”

He doesn’t wait for Hannibal’s response either way, simply turns on his heel to cross behind the bar properly, fishing a key from the register and bending low to a locked cabinet. He produces the bottle and then two tumblers, and Hannibal is relieved to see they *do* appear to be clean. He hesitates briefly when Will nods to the barstool across from his position, eyes lingering on the torn, faded vinyl and only perching upon it when he’s deemed there don’t seem to be any mystery stains marring it.

“Look, I know the boys get a bit rowdy on their way out. And sometimes they *only* get as far as *out* before they start causin’ trouble that I don’t gotta deal with. I sleep upstairs, I’m more’n aware of what these drunks get up to. I can recommend a stellar brand of earplugs, and try to remind the guys to keep it down after midnight, though I can’t promise it’ll do any good.”

Hannibal knows it's unreasonable to assume Will has any more control of the crowd his bar spits out than Hannibal has of them, especially when they leave plied with alcohol and bold with their drunkenness.

"Well, I suppose I can't fault you for your patrons anymore than you can blame me if mine appear a bit *uppity."*

A delightful pink flush blooms across Will's cheeks, and he has the good grace to dip his head bashfully. "S'pose it's not *their* fault we've got different tastes in booze. I come from a long line of good ol' fashioned, blue collar, drink-to-forgeters. Wine's never really appealed."

Hannibal smiles, running his finger along the edge of his tumbler. "It's all in the vintage, of course. A wine must be properly paired to an individual just as much as to a dish. Perhaps you'll indulge me and accept an offer to a private wine tasting Sunday evening. I'd take great pleasure in the chance to convert you."

Will smiles, and the gesture looks honest enough, Hannibal's pulse ticking up slightly at how it transforms Will's face into something youthful and full of mirth. "I reckon I'll take you up on that. I *also* come from a long line of never-turn-down-anything-freers. *Or* good company. I gotta start getting ready for the lunch crowd now, but you stick around, enjoy that scotch. I have a feelin' you're the proper sippin' type." Will picks up his glass and holds it aloft, eyes glinting with unabashed interest. "To new friends?'

Hannibal raises his own tumbler, a smile playing at the edges of his lips "To new friends."

Hannibal gives his scotch an appreciative sniff before taking a conservative sip, not surprised in the least when Will downs his all in one.

End Notes

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'Til next time! 💚 💜 BellaRai

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